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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: RESETTLEMENT ON THE FARMS: THE REALITY ON THE GROUND

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11. (SBU) Summary: A visit to four farms in a prime agricultural area 2 hours from Harare reveals that chaos reigns, and productivity by the new settlers hovers barely above zero. There is no rhyme nor reason to the occupations, and the newly resettled show little desire or ability to carry out even minimal crop production. Stick huts have been built randomly across previously productive fields. Settlers' crops are few in number, haphazardly planted, and poorly tended. White commercial farmers express bewilderment at how the rest of the world can stand by and watch their deliberate victimization without offering any hope or relief. End summary.

12. (SBU) On May 23-24, econoff visited several farms in the Karoi area, which was once a prime commercial cereal and tobacco-growing region. Of the properties visited, one farmer has been run completely off of his property by war veterans and settlers, a second has been confined by settlers to his homestead but not allowed to conduct any operations, a third has had several "settlements" established on his land but has been allowed to continue farming part of his property, and a fourth has not yet suffered incursions by settlers or war veterans. In Karoi, at least, there appears to be little rhyme or reason as to which farms are targeted -- there is no differentiation based on political affiliation of the landowner, existence of desirable infrastructure, resistance to the resettlement scheme by landowners, or even apparent suitability for specific crops. Although the drought has doubtless had some effect on the quality of crops, the radical difference between the condition of settlers' fields and those of commercial farmers who still remain on their land is remarkable. Even beyond the contrast between the levels of actual husbandry, there is no indication that any "settlers" in the area have planted -- much less reaped -- enough crops to support even their own nuclear families until the next harvest.

13. (SBU) One landowner was evicted from his farm in the early stages of the land acquisition exercise. He had initially opposed settlement by the occupiers and sustained a serious gash across his face from a settler's panga -- machete -- before being forced to vacate. Since his departure, his 20-hectare patch of coffee bushes -- now entering their fourth season, which would produce the first productive crop -- has been neglected since the farmer has not been allowed to return, and his employees have not been allowed to water the trees. The trees, loaded with a bumper crop of beans despite the season-long neglect, are dying amid the waist-high weeds that are choking the fields. There are currently no plans by anyone to harvest the crop. One conservative estimate is that over \$80,000 US -- badly needed forex -- is rotting in full sight of those who claim to be "land-hungry farmers." The image is startling, given the GOZ rhetoric regarding how the new economy will be driven by the newly-settled farmers.

14. (SBU) The second farm visited by econoff comprises about 1100 hectares, of which 400 are arable. The arable land has for years been under a tobacco/maize rotation, while the remainder had been stocked, at significant expense, with a wide range of game (eland, sable antelope, kudu, giraffe, etc.) to support a wildlife/safari operation. Since last year's growing season, when the occupiers took up residence, the farmer has not been allowed access to any of his land, and has been confined to his homestead by the war vets and settlers. Even this sanctuary was breached, when a settler demanding easier access to "his" fields battered down the farmer's front and back gates with repeated blows from a tractor. A quick tour of the property showed numerous stick-and-thatch huts thrown up randomly amid formerly fertile fields, with the settlers' crops totalling, at most, several acres. Prime land seized after last year's tobacco preparation -- i.e., fertilized, plowed, furrowed and irrigated -- now lies under a dense, uniform blanket of weeds and brush. The game has been either hunted by poachers or left to stray after the settlers cut holes in the game fences. Two giraffe calves, fit for neither sport nor table, were killed -- one left to rot next to the farmer's driveway and the other cut up for meat to feed the poachers' hunting dogs. The farmer has recently decided to leave his homestead

and has been moving some of his personal property -- including household furniture -- out of the house. After some settlers noticed the furnishings leaving the property, the grassland immediately bordering the farmer's homestead was set ablaze, leaving a wide swath of destruction. The farmer expects his home to be completely looted within a matter of hours after his departure. As an aside, several of the settlers approached the farmer in recent weeks to state that they had made a mistake trying to grow crops on his farm, and asking for the farmer's intervention to "pull strings" and get them re-located to a better farm. Rebuffed in this request, the settlers then stated that they were hungry, since they had harvested no crops, and asked the farmer to buy them maize-meal.

15. (SBU) The third farmer has been under siege by a contingent of settlers and war vets for the past two growing seasons. This farmer, who bought his property in 1992, has markedly improved the level of his laborers' accommodations through personal investment, and has supported infrastructure developments for all segments of the farming community. He built and staffed a school for laborers' children and upgraded all labor housing to brick buildings with running water, fulfilling his promise to provide adequate housing to all his labor before he began constructing an upgraded house for his own family. He has purchased milling machinery to process sunflower seed oil for the entire community of growers and has served as the local fuel delivery point person for the Zimbabwe Farmers' Union. When the occupation began, this farmer's initial response was not to give an inch. He experienced a steadily growing level of violence, including abuse of his children at all-night "pungwes." The farmer and twenty of his laborers later sustained severe beatings by a mob of war vets and occupiers last September. Since that time, he has decided to make as much use of his land as possible in hope of riding the situation out. The farm now supports three separate "villages" of settlers, while approximately half of the farm laborers and their families have been chased off the land. The farmer has been limited to sometimes random determinations of which fields he can use and which would be "settled." Again, huts have been erected haphazardly across some of the most fertile land, although crops being grown on these fields cover a mere fraction of the land seized, with the remainder reverting to bush. In one case, the farmer was forced to build a fence around a settler's weed-choked cotton patch in order for his cattle to graze in the rest of the field, since the settler accused the farmer of letting his cattle eat the settler's cotton. The farmer estimates that last year -- between crop losses, forced sale of livestock at the demands of the settlers, unproductive fields, and inputs invested in land subsequently seized -- his financial losses ran at \$74,242,000.00 zim dollars (approximately U.S. \$185,000). While he admits that his output was higher than average -- since he double-cropped some fields while pioneering some non-traditional methods in others -- his losses for one farm in one season can be extrapolated country-wide.

16. (SBU) The last farm visited has not been subjected to settlement, although it has been listed and de-listed several times. Currently, the farmer rotates tobacco and maize and grazes cattle. Although the farmer did manage to harvest his tobacco crop, he has not sold it since the current pricing and exchange rate structure do not provide any profit. The farmer has started to prepare his land for next season, and has reported that several farmers around his area are doing likewise. However, this prep work is more in the nature of an insurance policy. If the farmers do not prepare seed beds now, they will be unable to plant anything in September, even if the situation is stabilized. If the situation remains chaotic, however, with no farmer sure if he can reap the crop he sows, none of these commercial farmers intend to plant, thus depriving Zimbabwe of needed food and forex-generating exports.

17. (SBU) Econoff's conversations with the farmers repeatedly elicited requests for help from the USG. One farmer stated that he could not believe that the "free world" could stand by and watch while the GOZ destroyed an entire productive segment of its population. He pointed out that a bailout for the GOZ's de facto theft and irrefutable mismanagement -- even if it were to come sometime in the future -- would be exponentially more expensive, and help would never reach those citizens who are now being deliberately bankrupted. Other farmers insisted that the best way to get any response from the GOZ would be to extend existing travel sanctions to the children of the ruling elite, many of whom, they allege, are attending schools in the US. In response to econoff's arguments that a liberal education is a valid way to change young minds, they countered that the children of the ruling elite, once they get out of Zimbabwe, are highly unlikely ever to return. While escape is a goal of many Zimbabweans, it is an option currently unavailable to most of the remaining commercial farmers.

18. (SBU) Comment: These snapshots offer a view in microcosm

of the uncertainties reigning in Zimbabwe today. On an economic level, the message is clear -- the "fast track" resettlement has been a disaster that will cause long-term food shortfalls and continued economic decline. On the social level, it is clear that the white Zimbabwean commercial farmers risk extinction, but it is not clear that the resettled black Zimbabwean communal farmers will be better off from this process. The only unanswered question is whether the ongoing process will slow or be reversed before the damage to Zimbabwe, and its future, is irreparable, or if, indeed, the country has already passed the point of no return. End comment.

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